Caterina Figuerola
Ibon Bilbao (eds.)





gestating | living

BARCELONA'S SOCIAL HOUSING STRATEGIES



No. social housing units
2015-2023

Strategies

Completed | completed + planned

Completed	completed + planned	Strategies
1,112	3,722	IMHAB council housing production
1,505		Retrofitting purchased buildings
54	378	IMHAB industrialized council housing production
156	1,074	Foundations and Zero Equity Cooperatives FZEC Agreement
	762	HMB's affordable housing production
2,306		Areas of urban regeneration*
1,747		Mobilization of empty housing**

This map is a graphic representation of the impact of each of the seven strategies to increase social and affordable housing that Barcelona City Council has been carrying out since 2015, and those planned at January 2023, the date on which the edition of this book closed. The number of homes developed by each strategy, be it building, purchasing or retrofitting, has been taken as a common element.

*
The section "Areas of urban regeneration" includes homes that have benefited from the corresponding grants (high complexity properties and urban regeneration), and the homes of vulnerable people.

**
The "Mobilization of empty housing" section accounts for homes that are dealt with by the programme to acquire social and affordable dwellings: rental exchange, transfer programme (managed by Hàbitat3) and the programme to attract tourist apartments for social rental.

gestating living

BARCELONA'S
SOCIAL HOUSING
STRATEGIES

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Ajuntament de Barcelona | COAC
arquitectes.cat

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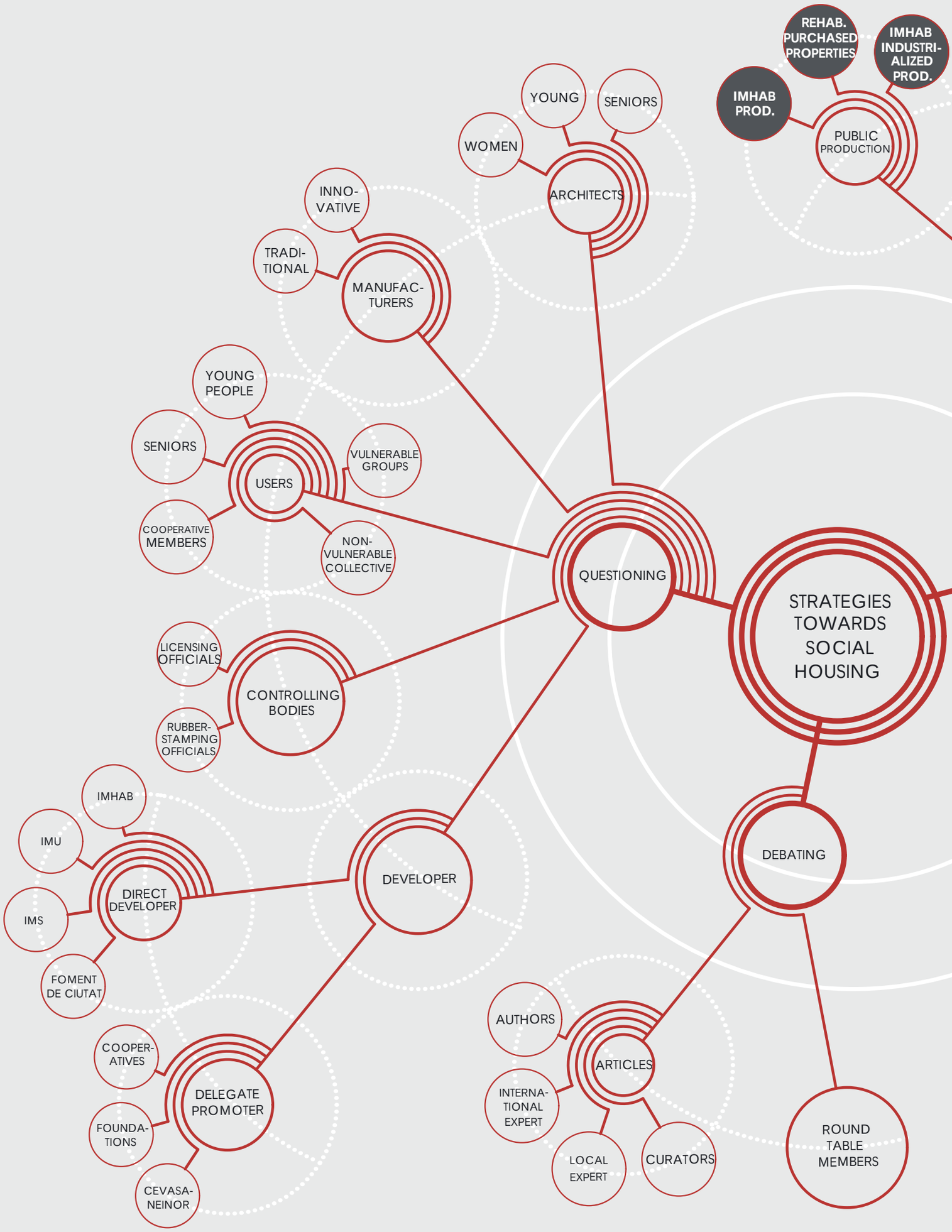
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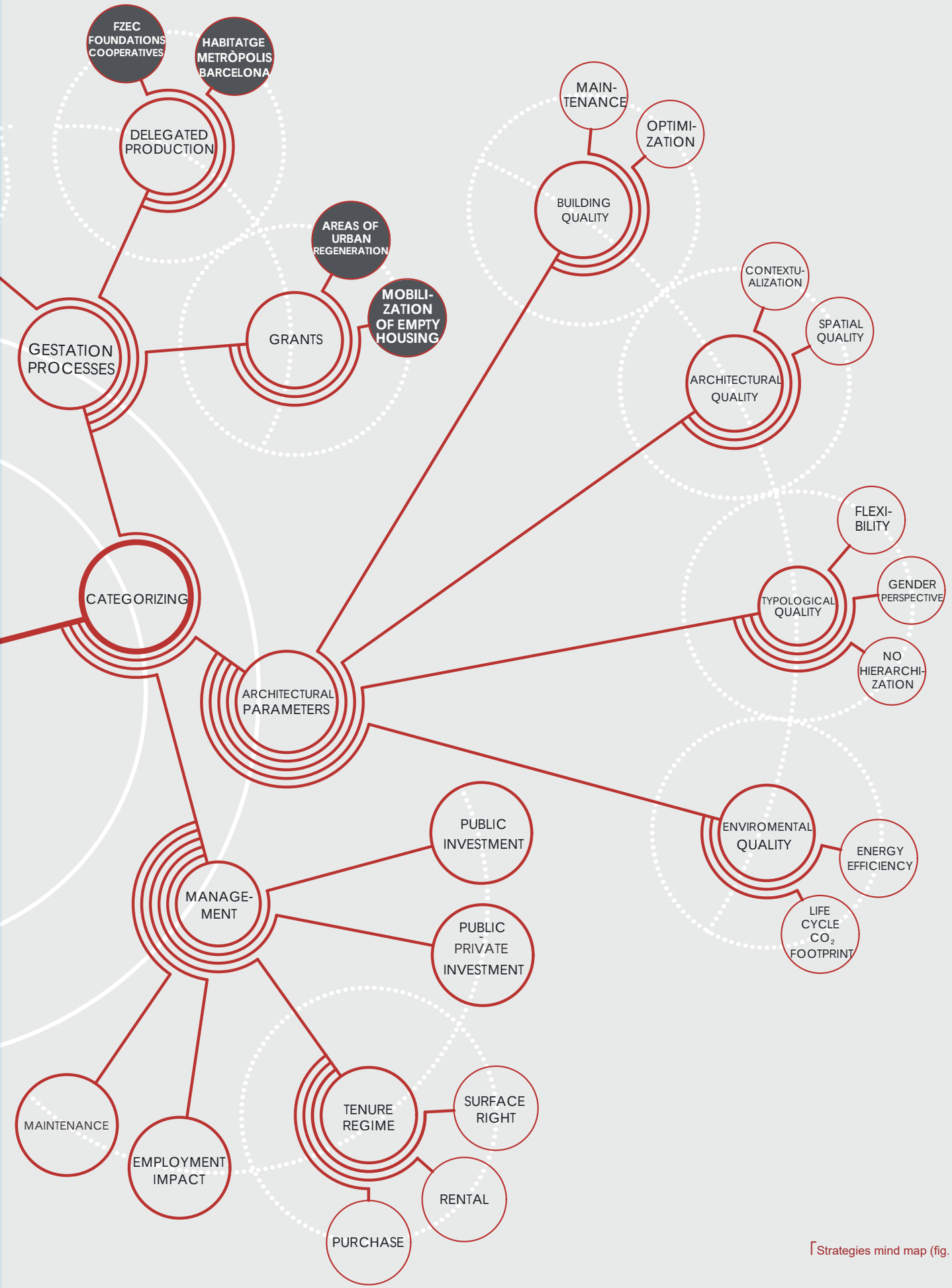
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STRATEGIES TOWARDS SOCIAL HOUSING
QUESTIONING
ARCHITECTS
YOUNG
SENIORS
WOMEN
PUBLIC PRODUCTION
REHAB. PURCHASED PROPERTIES
IMHAB INDUSTRI-ALIZED PROD.
IMHAB PROD.
MANUFAC-TURERS
INNO-VATIVE
TRADI-TIONAL
USERS
YOUNG PEOPLE
SENIORS
VULNERABLE GROUPS
COOPERATIVE MEMBERS
NON-VULNERABLE COLLECTIVE
CONTROLLING BODIES
LICENSING OFFICIALS
RUBBER-STAMPING OFFICIALS
DEVELOPER
DIRECT DEVELOPER
IMHAB
IMU
IMS
FOMENT DE CIUTAT
DELEGATE PROMOTER
COOPER-ATIVES
FOUNDA-TIONS
CEVASA-NEINOR
DEBATING
ARTICLES
AUTHORS
INTERNA-TIONAL EXPERT
LOCAL EXPERT
CURATORS
ROUND TABLE MEMBERS



「Strategies mind map (fig. 1)

Strategies for increasing social and affordable housing in Barcelona

The purpose of housing is to be lived in. This statement may at first seem obvious, but it does not always hold true. Clearly, the speculative value housing has acquired as a market commodity has on many occasions deflected it dramatically from this purpose. In the case of social housing, however, a change is occurring: we are seeing the transition from housing for sale to other forms of tenure, such as sheltered housing for rent, or transfer of use so that the land and buildings do not lose their public ownership, in this way avoiding the processes of speculation and gentrification.

This book presents and analyses the different strategies to develop and build social and affordable housing adopted in recent years by the municipal administration of the city of Barcelona. It selects a series of projects that exemplify the maximum number of work methodologies, briefs and innovative proposals, preferably already built and lived in, to be able to draw on the experience and situation of the people who live in them and get to know them at first hand.

We bring two approaches to these strategies: **GESTATING** and **LIVING**. By GESTATING we understand a whole process leading from the decision to develop these projects until the people who will live there receive the keys to their homes, via the various contracting mechanisms, project phases and construction. The protagonists of this process are all the agents involved: government, Architects' Association, architects, design and construction teams, and even users, in the case of cooperatives.

Alongside this process of GESTATING, we introduce LIVING. The inhabitants, in their everyday lives, give meaning to a home: how they appropriate the space and how they adapt it to their circumstances; how they experience all of these projects personally and how it affects them in their lives; how they live together and how they navigate the different areas of the neighbourhood, the building and the dwelling.

As curators, it seemed important to us to address the process of generating social housing due to both its urgency and its complexity. Most of the projects included in this book have been featured in other publications, but on this occasion we wanted to relate the entire journey, from planning the development to the experience of being lived in. This responds to our desire to visibilize the administrative, technical and human resources behind a complex process that we think it is vital to know in all its dimensions in order to appreciate its value.

As architects who are interested in social housing projects, we have always wanted to know precisely all the aspects surrounding the fact that people end up living in the homes we design and domesticating the spaces defined by us. It is important to say that many factors and agents intervene in a process of generating social housing, making it a complex journey in which everyone concerned has their commitment and their part to play. For a long time now, we have wanted to know about the pre-project phase, all the previous steps taken to ensure that a project is, finally, developed and built; above all, we considered it essential to know about the post-project phase, a look at life in the homes once work is complete, accompanied by the presence of the user. It is a parameter that is not often taken into account, but adding the imprint of the end user to the design process can give us guidelines for reflection about the decisions to be made when addressing the new challenges presented by contemporary housing.

As citizens, we felt the need to explore the strategic value of social and affordable housing and its capacity to generate neighbourhood and community relations, and to respond to the housing emergency in the context of a very broad range of life situations.

These are the concerns and reflections that fuel this publication, promoted by the COAC (Architects' Association of Catalonia) and Barcelona City Council. Thanks to this co-participation, it has been possible to table social housing from the point of view of architectural quality and the strategies implemented in order to produce it. We set out to produce a book that, as well as showing the built work, invites reflection on social housing in quantitative and qualitative terms.

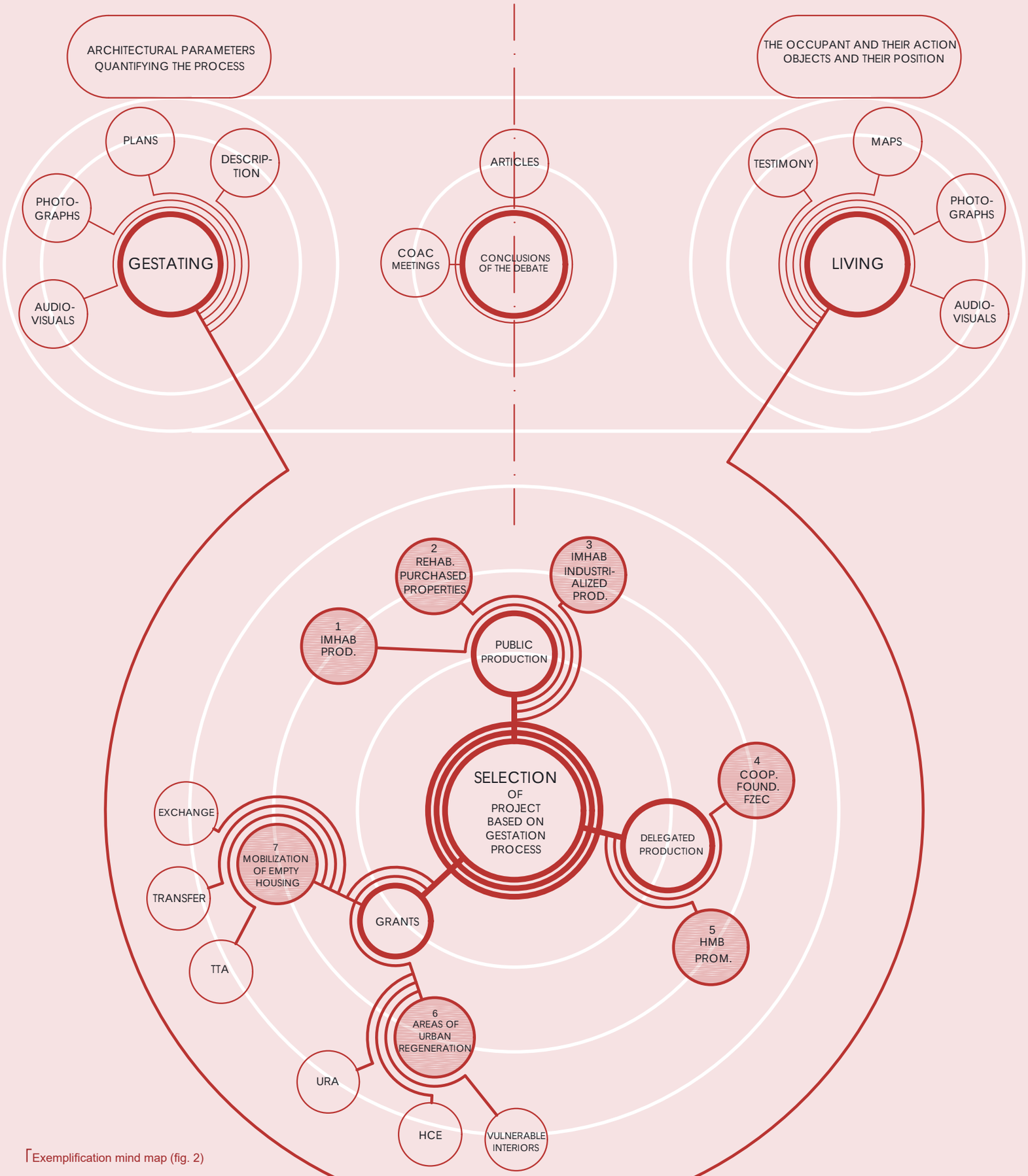
The methodology of the book begins with the creation of three mind maps: strategies, exemplification and production, defining the conceptual framework and scope of the publication.

The **strategy mind map** (Fig. 1) organizes the explanation according to three actions developed simultaneously on the theme of social housing: categorizing, questioning and debating.

Categorizing allowed us to show and understand the parameters affecting **the quantity and the quality** of the proposed production, the various development and subsidy formulas being applied by the municipal government, and the extent to which the results meet the demands of architectural quality and the requirements of sustainability and energy efficiency.

In terms of management, the most significant fact is a commitment to tenure regimes that mean that the public administration does not relinquish ownership of the housing or land that it develops directly or by delegation. This fact introduces a new, absolutely determinant and across-the-board parameter: **maintenance** of the building, land and dwellings for the duration of their useful life.

Introduction



Exemplification mind map (fig. 2)

This categorization, based on the three processes of gestation (public production, delegated production and subsidies), informs the **seven strategies** for social and affordable housing outlined in this publication: **public production by the IMHAB + retrofitting of purchased buildings + industrialized housing production by the IMHAB + delegated production by foundations and zero equity cooperatives (FZEC Agreement) + delegated production by Habitatge Metròpolis Barcelona (HMB) + retrofitting of vulnerable environments + mobilization of empty housing.**

Questioning the agents involved in the development of each of the strategies has provided necessary information about forms of direct or delegated production: the administrative and design phases undergone and the time invested in each, the times of intervention and the time taken until housing is allocated. One of the aims of this approach is to expose the complexity of the process and quantify the time and human resources needed to allow people ultimately to live in social housing. We also considered it vital to record the testimony of the people who live in the projects presented that are already a reality.

Debating with all the agents involved in the management of social housing production, be they developers, government technicians, cooperative members, designers of the various projects or constructors, is an opportunity to hear the contribution of each to a process that begins with the allocation of a municipal plot for residential use. And it does not end with the handover of keys to the people or groups who will live in those homes; it will continue, in most of the strategies, for years, with the responsibility for maintenance and management. For this reason, during the process of gestation of this publication we organized two working days at the COAC headquarters, during which the teams that designed the projects exemplifying each of the strategies sat down to talk with the people from the municipal government, foundations or cooperatives responsible for developing and managing them, and the constructors who materialized them. This represented reflection on the processes of gestation.

The **exemplification mind map** (Fig. 2) developed the methodology for defining the graphic, audiovisual and written content of this book.

The transition from GESTATING to LIVING occurs when people are given the keys to their home and move in. A total of 23 case studies is presented to exemplify each of the seven strategies. Of these, 16 are lived in and are therefore addressed in terms of GESTATING and LIVING, while the remaining seven, at the design stage or not yet lived in at the time of writing, are addressed in their gestation.

To explain the GESTATION, we asked the design teams for the project documentation and most representative landmarks in the process, highlighting the documents generated in the different phases, including intermediate states, tests and waivers. The images provided by the teams represent the construction process and the finished building before it is lived in. The various administrations were asked to provide information and relevant dates in the previous and subsequent design and construction phases, ranging from the announcement of production to the adjudication or handing over of keys to users.

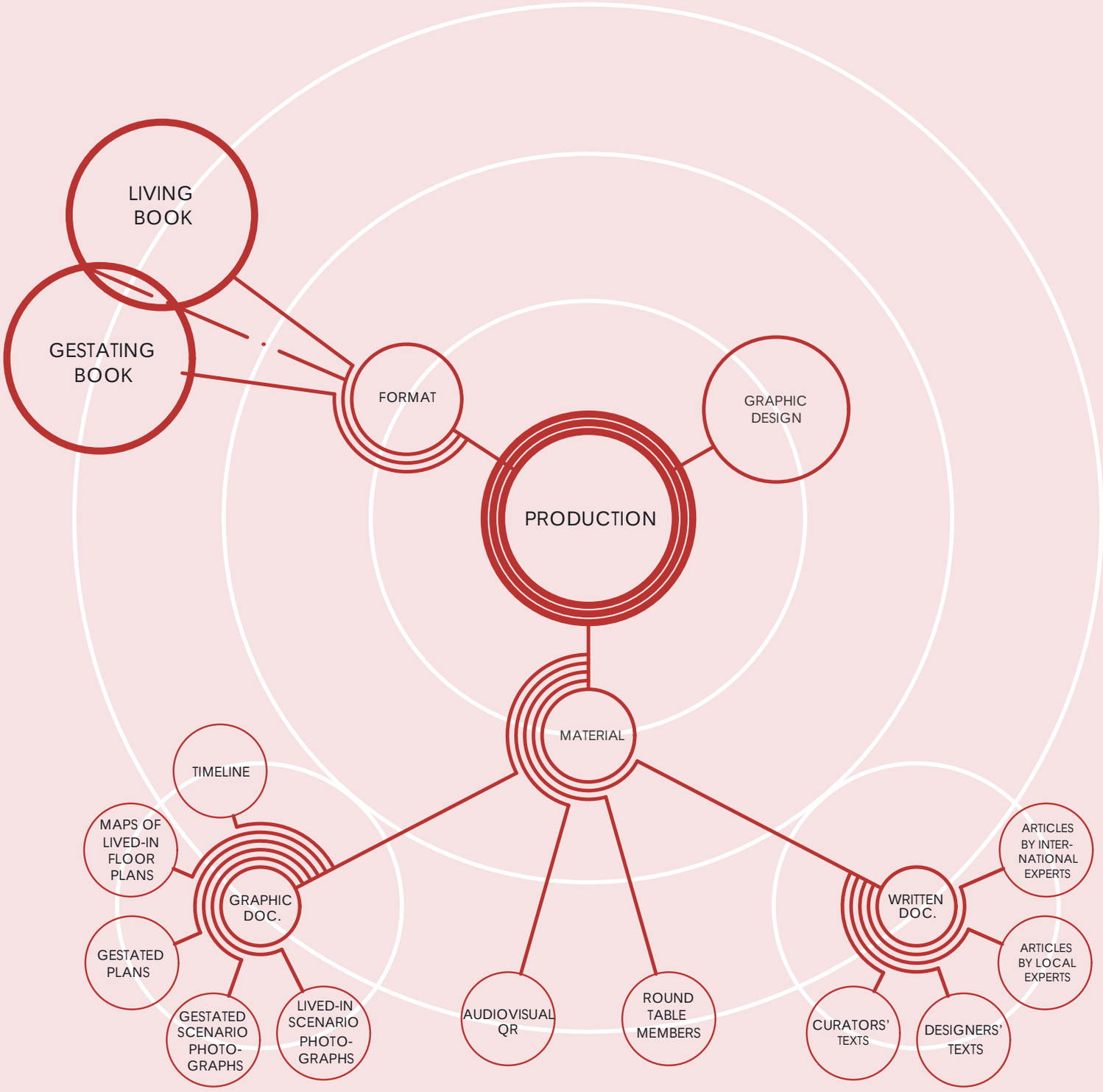
All the graphic and audiovisual material to document LIVING was generated specially for this publication. These are documents that illustrate the everyday lives of the occupants and their circumstances. The photographs taken by Adrià Goula show the buildings today in their urban context, and the photographs of the communal spaces and interiors of the homes taken by Maite Caramés show how they are being lived in. It was necessary to access the homes in order to map the way the spaces are occupied and to record testimonies. It was time to talk to the occupants: they explained and we took note, modelling and drawing their situation. This fieldwork meant contacting the users of 258 homes to be able finally to go into 66 of them, in 16 different buildings.

First, mapping domestic life incorporated the occupants' and users' testimony and experience of living in the chapters dedicated to each strategy. Then the specific chapter on interventions at the professional meetings organized at the COAC brought to the debate the voices of all the agents involved in the gestation of the various strategies.

The twofold GESTATING/LIVING approach further allowed us to open each chapter with two complementary articles, giving a voice to multiple agents in different disciplines who intervened personally or as experts in one of the strategies. All this forms the theoretical body deriving from the debate.

The **production mind map** (Fig. 3) presents the material produced to make the book.

As well as organizing its contents, the GESTATING/LIVING double entry also defines the book's graphic design. In every case we worked with a double page, one with a colour background for gestating and one with a white background for living, so you always know which entry the documentation you are looking at belongs to.



Production mind map (fig. 3)

Each of the chapters explaining a strategy is presented by the diagram of the strategy mind map as a guide to situate each example in each category, and opens with two articles about gestating and living. The first graphic information we find in each example is the project timeline. This is followed, page by page, with documents about gestating by the design teams and about living by the team of curators. In the central part of the chapter, the photographs of occupation occupy a double page to compare different ways of living.

The graphic documentation of the gestation provided by the design teams was redrafted to unify the graphics, and specific documents were generated about the living process for this publication in the form of articles, timelines, floor plans, audiovisuals with user testimonies, photographs of the buildings in their current urban context and comparative images.

The book opens by unfolding the cover to show the **quantitative map of social and affordable housing developments in Barcelona**, where each of the strategies to develop social housing in the city is quantified and shown graphically by district. The total number of social housing units developed between 2015 and 2023 and scheduled at January 2023, the date on which the edition of this book closed, was quantified.

Various **articles** are proposed to introduce the words GESTATING/LIVING into the discourse on housing and reflect on its direction in the near future. The book opens with two institutional forewords and two introductory articles about the two approaches, written by international experts. Each strategy opens with two articles by national experts as a lead-in to the projects that exemplify it.

The **production timeline** is a document showing the sequence of the different phases and significant dates in the process of each production. It begins with the decision by the Council to start development of a plot and ends with the handover of keys to users. The fold-out document that closes the book is a comparative timeline of all the developments.

Based on the editable files provided by the teams that designed the 23 developments selected, **all the graphic material of the gestation was redrawn** to unify the graphics of the publication and present comparable material.

Thanks to the fieldwork carried out on each of the visits, the **lived-in floor plan** of each home was drawn, producing 16 experiences. The floor plan is seen as a support for information collected to represent reality, like a map of an instant at which objects are seen as a prolongation of the subject, and the interaction with them of the user is what gives them meaning and makes them complete.

The map shows a whole series of objects that have to be seen not as isolated but in the context of a home, where someone invades a space with their way of living. It is this space that we have to understand, based on each particular case. These graphic documents aim rigorously and accurately to transmit and represent the condition of the everyday —of living.

We wanted to record, on an audiovisual support, our **interviews with the inhabitants** of the various developments studied. We made 21 recordings in 16 different buildings. We asked just three questions that were deliberately very open so as not to direct the occupants towards a specific topic: what is the neighbourhood like? what's the building like? what's your home like? Addressing three scales, from the urban to the domestic, including the community, but with the idea that each person should talk about the issues they considered relevant on each. Listening to the occupants in their context provided a great deal of information to compare. You can view the videos by using the QR code printed next to a still from the interview.

Adrià Goula **photographed the buildings in their urban context.** Years later, he returned to the buildings in question to photograph them with an eye to the relationships being created between them and public space, to the ability of housing to create city. Each chapter establishes a dialogue between the infographics of the imagined building, the photographs of the finished building contributed by the design teams involved in the gestation process, and photographs of the now lived-in building.

Maite Caramés took the **photographs of the communal spaces** of the 16 buildings and the **comparative photographs of living** in 66 homes. She entered them with her eyes set on the different neighbourhood relationships and the very diverse ways of seeing the same space in terms of everyday life. In the middle of each chapter is a photograph of the same space in four representative homes of the building in question. We think that her text expresses very well the meaning and value of these photographs:

“The photographs that form part of this book were taken with the aim of creating a comparison that showed the diversity of ways of living in similar spaces in various homes in Barcelona.

This posed a number of technical challenges for a photographer. One of them was repetition: in order to present the contrast between almost identical spaces, it was important always to find the same viewpoint. But this was not easy due to the variety of layouts: where one family had an open-plan space, another had placed a piece of furniture that got in the way; where someone had their television, someone else had piled boxes that obstructed the view. And this was the case with so many things.

Another challenge was working with natural light and doing it at times of day that we could not choose, because we were dependent on the availability of the occupants of the spaces to take the photographs. This meant that on some occasions you would come up against backlighting and on others you would find a dull, milky lighting, and, on yet others, a series of contrasts made it impossible to produce a halfway decent image.

A final challenge was the harmonious combination of people and spaces. People are the heart of the project, but so are the spaces they occupy, and the lens that is used to cover as much surface as possible, often used in architecture photography, is rarely the best for portraits of people. This challenge was also consistent with the realist principle inherent in this type of project: the idea was to present scenes in keeping with people’s real habits –to compile a small assortment of typical portraits that show how these people live in certain homes in Barcelona, and to do so in a credible, varied way.

But all of these challenges had great rewards: the first was coming into contact with lives that speak of realities I was unaware of, that inhabit the same city in which I was born and where I also live. All the people who opened their door to us did so disinterestedly and kindly. In some cases there was prior contact and consent, but others were cold calls: a knock at the door, unknown faces, cameras, a few words about the project, suspicion. And yet, in the end, they let us in.

The other great reward was being able to discover, in the company of a generous, committed team, the more tender face of architecture, the face that gets excited when it discovers the life that beats inside the homes that have been gestated.”

Maite Caramés



Guim Costa
President of the Architects' Association of Catalonia-COAC

gestating

According to the dictionary of the Catalan language, the meaning of the verb gestate is "to form and develop, in the females of viviparous animals, the embryo in their entrails until the moment of birth".

It is no coincidence that this word is included in the title of this book, since the process by means of which we first imagine, then design and, finally, physically build a home is, ultimately, a figurative process of gestation that culminates with the delivery of a unique and specific project in response to the original functional brief and prior specifications.

Each home has to allow each person and each cohabitation unit to shape their particular microcosm in keeping with their way of living, incorporating dynamics and elements to make it a comfortable and, at the same time, energy-efficient private space.

Accordingly, when this book talks about gestation, it aims to emphasize this process of embryonic development up until the moment of birth—in this case of a home that allows the development of its users, with their particularities and circumstances, and with the appropriate expenditure of energy.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that everyone has the right to a standard of living that ensures their health and well-being, especially as regards food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services.

The regulation of the right to housing in the Universal Declaration was the first time that housing was recognized as fundamental to living a decent life, to a personal identity, especially as regards privacy, but also to everyday life and the creation of life expectations.

The Spanish Constitution, furthermore, recognizes the right to housing as a guiding principle of socio-economic policy, so the public authorities must try to protect it, as they do universal medical services and the public education network. From the viewpoint of equal opportunities, they must also guarantee that citizens have access to it, by means of public intervention avoiding social exclusion.

Today's urban concentration and the economic and environmental crisis raise the need to review the process of creating housing — whether by means of major retrofitting or new construction— and to manage it in cities to provide coverage for all needs.

This task corresponds to the government, which must regulate land use and the major processes of remodelling the existing urban fabric, seeking the general interest, avoiding speculation and, further, implementing new innovations and proposals to generate healthy, energetically-sustainable spaces, in order to avoid overexploitation of the environment and citizens.

The right to housing is, then, a right that tends to eradicate social differences, and it is in this aspect that the book you have before you aims to present a new line of work: public intervention in the field of housing in order to give this social right effective content, but with an innovative approach that, for the past eight years, Barcelona City Council has been carrying out in collaboration with the other integral parties in the process: architects, developers and contractors.

This book therefore presents the learning process represented by the development of these social projects and conclusions that can be drawn to show not just successful projects, but also possibilities for improvement in the future.

Each of the parties involved, with their expertise, contributed in a coordinated, crosscutting process to designing a global system that culminated in the production of a series of homes to meet various social needs in which, with the leadership of the Administration, the process is actively coordinated with all interested parties.

Without doubt, it is a task that invites reflection on the strategy to be followed in an urban context in which space is scarce, and vulnerabilities and needs are numerous, all the more so at a time like the present, when the economic, social, energy and environmental situation is particularly delicate.

living

Anna Vergés
Architect. Co-Director of BIAU Living on the Fringe

Housing and habitability

Access to adequate housing is a right because it is a guarantee of safety and health. From a strategic or political point of view, to make an analogy with the field of health, we understand the importance of solid information and ongoing research to providing appropriate responses to the diversity of specific diseases. Housing policy follows the same premise and complexity. And in order to address the issue of housing in the city of Barcelona, the first thing that the Housing and Rehabilitation Department of Barcelona City Council did was to promote a housing observatory at metropolitan level to collect all the necessary information about the state of housing, especially with regard to difficulties accessing it. “If it can’t be measured, it doesn’t exist”, as Antón Costas reminded us at the first meeting of the scientific committee.

This publication reflects the results obtained by this task of measurement and deploys a range of varied proposals that seeks to democratize flexible options for access to affordable housing, with a housing stock that is still limited but which is calling for a change of perspective and attitude to new ways of living.

Internationally, problems of access to and maintenance of housing are accentuated, especially among the most disadvantaged population. A housing famine has been growing, turning housing into a scarce and inaccessible commodity for many, with situations in which citizens see their expectations for the future limited. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to focus the debate on how to “feed” cities and neighbourhoods with adequate housing to face present-day emergencies and propose humanized environments in which people can grow, relate and progress towards inclusive, productive and creative societies –and do so by rethinking a strategy to address the social, environmental and economic challenges of our living environments.

Problems and solutions

In the economic field, the context generated by persistent crises merely aggravates inequalities in the socio-economic reality of the population. This situation increases the need to access care support and affordable or social housing. In Spain, the difficulties are endemic, given the existing low percentage of social housing (2.5% compared to an average of 9.1% in Europe). This problem is due, in part, to the lack of diversity in housing policies in recent decades, focused on developing sheltered housing for disqualified sale, causing the loss of the opportunity to accumulate a volume of adequate social housing.

This fact is reflected in the property market, where the prices offered do not meet the needs of a significant part of the demand, especially in the rental field. This form of tenure is increasing compared to ownership, especially in the city (38.4% rentals in 2019), given the difficulties of repaying a mortgage loan, so that young people, single-parent families, the migrant population, etc., are excluded even from this option.

In the city, sustainable development goals promoted by the United Nations show that urban environments are increasingly populated spaces, with 54% in 2015 worldwide (74% in Europe) and a forecast for 2035 of 62% (79% in Europe). Cities therefore have even more responsibility for guaranteeing good habitability and developing strong housing policies.

But inequalities also affect the type of population according to gender, age and origin, leaving certain population groups with specific needs more unprotected. Progressive changes in the makeup of families reduce the number of people per household and modify the usual forms of cohabitation. This fact increases the number of housing units needed in more populated areas and calls for forms that are more flexible in time, with more complex management. Alternative forms of tenure such as cooperatives, housing exchange, cohousing, urban occupation agreements or temporary accommodation are new formulas required by different ways of living, and are promoted by the municipality in Barcelona through the Foundations and Zero Equity Cooperatives Agreement.

These changes are also reflected in urban planning and design. The car is beginning to cease to be at the centre of the urban structure, with policies turning towards sustainable mobility, which places citizens at the centre and allows for improved coexistence. We are seeing a collective determination to make the city more domestic and liveable, promoted by an inclusive urban planning that takes gender, race and age into account in the characteristic features of its design and promotes relationships between its actors.

Added to these factors is another very important challenge, the environmental one, determined by the effects of climate change and the need to mitigate the impact of construction and the CO_2 emissions of existing construction, particularly housing, which represent over 40% of the total volume of emissions in Europe.

The strategic change involves recycling existing buildings: retrofitting and adapting this stock must serve to reduce the excessive consumption of fossil fuels and the use of unsustainable construction materials. This challenge must guarantee continued maintenance of housing and reverse the negative effects on health caused by the expenses that arise from it.

The recent European New Generation funds are an opportunity to reverse the situation, especially necessary in the city of Barcelona, where the residential stock is quite old, and to make the necessary grants or loans available to owners to improve the conditions of their homes.

Transversality

All of these challenges that arise from living in and building social housing stock cannot be considered solely as the task of government agencies, and must be shared with the private sector, social bodies, cooperatives, etc. They represent a solid basis that is growing bigger and stronger every day in Barcelona, encouraging entrepreneurship in the form of innovative shared projects, such as the Habitatge Metròpolis Barcelona project and the Foundations and Zero Equity Cooperatives Agreement.

If we look at developing countries, with a virtually non-existent public system, we see how informality grows, often becoming a majority option: a system that guarantees access to precarious housing, with the emergence of participatory initiatives, that are collectively managed to improve the living conditions of the immediate environment. They are an example of an attitude that, with the necessary support, could become a strategy, a seed of a policy to undertake projects to improve housing, based on the diversity of existing needs.

In Europe we have an enviable welfare system, inclined to see the emergence of shared public initiatives. In Barcelona, these policies have been built on the basis of solid information, making it possible to address various strategies to promote and provide responses in keeping with the specific needs of certain collectives, as shown in the projects included in this publication.

There is still a long way to go, committing to the promotion of affordable rent, exchange and cooperation, in the desire to bring about a change of perspective that places citizens at the centre of the collective imaginary, makes housing and habitability central challenges in the coming years.